

I feel the tremendous parallels between this movement and the first-century church—you know, meeting in apartments, persecuted by the government, rejected by the religious establishment, but a movement that loves people, cares for people, makes people find a new warmth in life, a new meaning in life, a new love for life, and a movement that is happening whether people like it or not, which is going to get stronger and stronger as people affirm its truth . . .

— A Last Message from
A Minister,
Church of the Open Door
Louisville, Kentucky



The Gay Christian

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The appearance of any name in this magazine should not be taken as an indication of that person's sexual orientation.

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We welcome articles and news about Gay Christians everywhere.

Cradle Me, Sweet Jesus Up to Your Broken Heart

Cradle me, sweet Jesus,
Up to your broken heart.
Forgive me for not knowing you
Right from the start.
You shared your love even with the ones
who tore you apart.
Cradle me, cradle me, Sweet Jesus,
Up to your broken heart.

Cradle me, sweet Jesus,
Like an orphan child.
You saw me through the life I lived
So wand'ring and wild.
You never turned your back on anyone
Who called you by name.
I wandered far away from you,
But you loved me just the same.

Sweet Jesus, I am wasted,
So tired and blue;
I really wish that I could be
A little more like you.
The very ones who wounded me
Have wounded you.
Cradle me, Sweet Jesus,
I want to be near you.

-- bitsyangelina Di Santo

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The Church of the Open Door

by James E. Ricketson

A MAN was murdered recently in Louisville, Kentucky. A former minister, who had served for a number of years in a responsible position at the National Council of Churches before moving to Louisville, he had begun taking a role of active leadership in the gay community in the months before his death--helping in the formation of a new church with a ministry to gays in Louisville, and starting a gay discussion group. So far, the murder has not been solved, but there is reason to believe that he may have been trying to help someone else in trouble when it happened.

A dynamic, outgoing person, he had friends scattered all across the country. His influence on the lives of many others in a wide variety of circles--secular and religious, gay and straight--will continue as a living testimony to the effectiveness of his life. Though he was becoming quite open and up-front, we have avoided using his name here out of regard for his parents, whom he had not yet told about his being gay, although he had mentioned to friends that he planned to tell them the next time he was with them.

Here are some excerpts from a tape he recorded and sent to friends in New York just a week before his death:

"As for our church, we have gone ahead and written our constitution, and we are now incorporating under the state laws of Kentucky. We're calling it the Church of the Open Door. We had our first meeting last Sunday in the sanctuary of the First Unitarian Church (having been meeting previously in an apartment). We will meet there regularly from now on. We are paying twenty-five dollars a week to rent the sanctuary for Sunday evening use. No Christian group would let us meet in their sanctuary, so we had to go to the Unitarians. Their big concern was that we were Christian, not that we were gay! Which I think is sort of funny. But they worked through this and came up with the most beautiful document you've ever read, inviting us to use their facilities. And it's really far more Christian than any of the Christian churches in the city at this point.

"In addition to all the time I've been spending working on the church, getting its constitution written, I've also established a group similar to the West Side Discussion Group. We're calling it the Louisville Discussion Group. At the present time it's meeting on a weekly basis here at my apartment, but beginning in April we will be meeting at the Unitarian Church in their social hall. This past Thursday we had ten people in attendance, which is our high, and

it seems as though we gain about one or two a week; but I feel that after we get downtown at the church, we should grow a little bit faster. If we can have twenty-five a week for a while, I will be quite satisfied. The bars have agreed to let us leave our flyers there for people to pick up, and that's a good step, and so quite a few people in the gay community now know about it.

"The pastor of the Unitarian Church and one of our pastors and I had an appointment the other day with the Louisville chief of police, to inform him of the formation of these gay groups, as well as the times and places where they would be meeting, and to request their support and understanding. We found him extremely open and responsive. So, while I don't predict that Louisville's going to turn gay next week, I certainly think we have made tremendous strides since January 1, and so far have made friends with the police chief, and I think we'll get good support in general from lower-level people in the police department. I'm sure that there will be some who are antigay in the police department, but when they know of the kind of support the chief is giving us, I'm sure that will act as an inhibiting factor. So now the police chief has my name and phone number and my open identification as a gay person, so I don't need to worry about that any more!

"All of these activities have really been keeping me busy. Now both the church and the discussion group are really beginning to go on their own steam, and I hope that gradually I'll be able to stand back and let them run on their own and with their own leadership, and I won't have to spend so much time and effort and emotional energy on them. My main concern is not to be the leader of either of the groups but simply to help them get started and to have them here in Louisville, and I will be more than happy to relinquish the leadership positions very soon.

"Well, while we're on the subject of gay organizations, the Bloomington Gay Alliance at Indiana University is sponsoring a gay awareness conference. And they have some really good leadership coming in--Franklin Kameny from Washington, Bill Johnson, Peter Fisher, Marc Rubin, Dr. Martin Weinberg from the Kinsey Institute of Sex Research, which is at Indiana University, Phyllis Lyon from Glide Church in San Francisco. And they've got a good program lined up. They have invited me to be on a panel to discuss homoerophobia--what it is, how it affects an individual, and how we can better deal with this problem in ourselves and others. I

"Their big concern was that we were Christian, not that we were gay!"

have consented to be on this panel and am really looking forward to it.

"Also, a friend of mine who was on my board when I was at the National Council of Churches is now the number-two man at the Indiana Council of Churches. They were asked to be one of the sponsors of the Bloomington conference and they declined to do that. But under Walter's leadership they are going to send some observers. He is trying to get several pastors, some staff people, as well as some Christian laymen who are doctors, psychiatrists, lawyers, teachers, and so forth, to form his group who will come and be a part of the conference. He's going to have a luncheon for his group on Saturday; and, knowing that I am gay and now involved in the movement and that I have a Council of Churches background, he has asked me to come and dialogue with their group and help them think through what will be appropriate responses and actions on their part.

"So I'm quite flattered to be involved in that group, and feel that I can make a real contribution to them simply because I've been involved in Council of Churches movements; and I hope they will find that point of identification a positive thing from which they can work.

"I'm now fully realizing the truth to a statement that Morty Manford--or was it Jim Owles?--made at some meeting you and I attended together; that you get into this movement as a closet case or not too far out of the closet, and the more you get involved, the more you come out of the closet. If I had ever anticipated a year ago that I would be going to the Louisville chief of police and leading a conference for the Indiana Council of Churches as an openly gay person, I would have just laughed. But I'm doing it now, and I feel good about it. It's exciting. I feel I'm proceeding in a responsible manner and that I'm making a real contribution to Louisville and to this society as a whole.

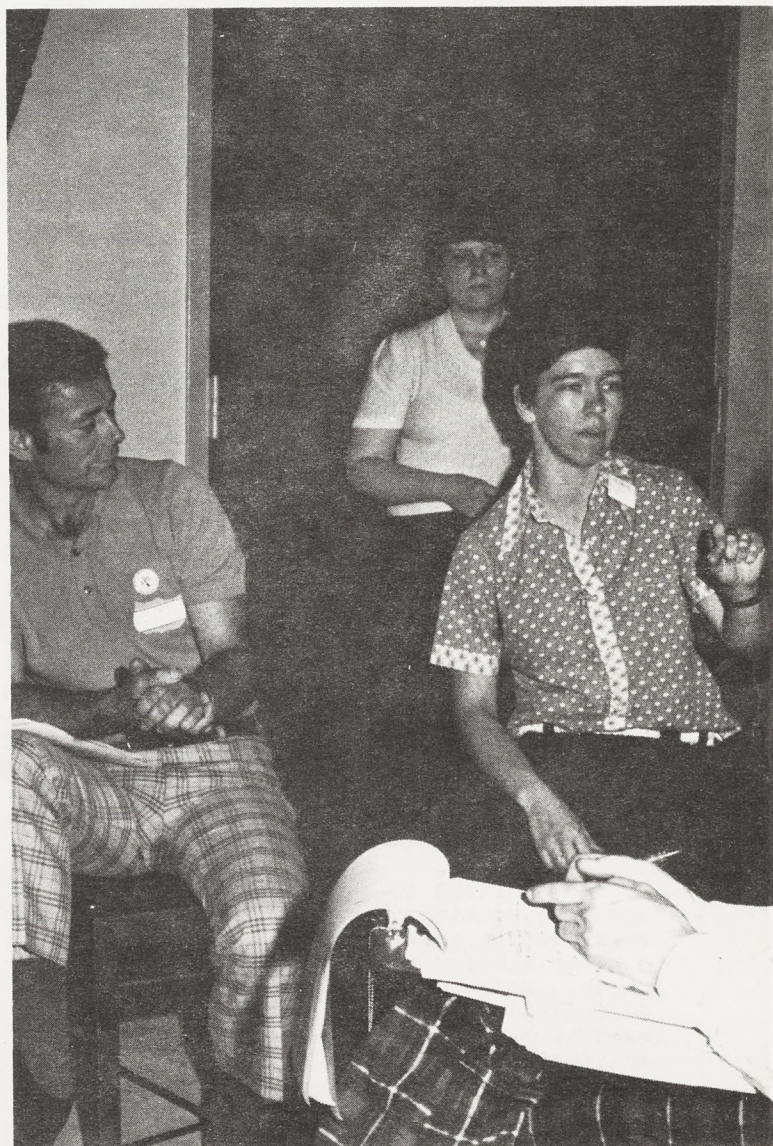
"When I go to the churches like the MCC's in Indianapolis and Cincinnati, and when I see what our church is doing, I have the most tremendous excitement. I feel the tremendous parallels between this movement and the first-century church--you know, meeting in lofts, meeting in apartments, persecuted by the government, rejected by the religious establishment, but a movement that loves people, cares for people, makes people find a new warmth in life, a new meaning in life, a new love for life, and a movement that is happening whether people like it or not, which is going to get stronger and stronger as people affirm its truth.

"I just wouldn't be anywhere else at the moment. I'm glad I'm finally to this point. But I also realize that I would not be at this point if it were not for many, many hours of talking with you on these subjects and each one of us helping the other; and also from being in Judson Church--God bless that church! it's the greatest thing in the world--and West Side Discussion Group, and the other movements that I was aware of and peripherally related to in New York. The fact that other people have gone first, you know, now helps me at this stage to come in and do and be what I am at this time."

POSTSCRIPT

The Church of the Open Door closed its door at the end of May. The Louisville Discussion Group was reported to be still meeting in early July but just barely managing to stay alive. There have been several other cases of gays being murdered or critically wounded in assaults in Louisville within recent months, but surviving victims and others who might have information on the assailants have generally been unwilling to go to the police with what they know.

One of the co-ministers of the church has concluded regretfully that the Louisville gay community is simply too afraid and too closeted to be able to organize and work for liberation yet. But he says, "We've planted seeds by what we've done. Perhaps we still need more time for personal growth; but that is taking place, and I believe in another year or so it should be possible for new efforts to bear more fruit."



MAKING A POINT AT DISTRICT CONFERENCE: Leadership Development Workshop, Northeast District Conference, Washington, D.C., May 18, 1974. (Photo: Scott Johnson.)

God Loves You, She Really Does!

by Susan Day

"And the Spirit and the bride say, 'Come.'
And let each one that heareth say, 'Come.'
And let each that is athirst come. And
whosoever will, let that one take of the
water of life freely." (Rev. 22:17)

Since the emergence of women's liberation, many women have felt estranged from the Church --and most for very legitimate reasons. For often when we sense distance between ourselves and others, it's either because it's been put there by one or the other, or because we're unable to understand each other.

Let's backtrack a bit. When we refer to the "Church" we can mean, usually, one of two images: the most common for those turned off is the church in a structural sense --the hierarchy of titles, honors, ego-trips, laws and guilt trips which people in "high" positions (mostly men) lay on people in "low" positions (mostly women).

The other, and far more important (though less emphasized) is the image of the Church as the Body of Christ. It's the latter with which we as lesbians must concern ourselves ultimately. For it's as part of the Body of Christ that we will all find the deepest meaning and beauty for our lives. Unfortunately, both images don't coincide right now... there should be only the latter meaning to the word "Church." What we must remember right from the beginning is that the "structural church" was defined and developed by human beings; the "spiritual Church" was given to us by God. The Body of Christ is spiritual in nature; and when we have begun to feel that spirit, we have become one with others who are also filled with it.

I'm now going to list and try to answer some questions and complaints frequently posed by feminists (and which you might have in your mind.)

1. It turns me off to worship a male God!

-We human beings have addressed and referred to God using images with which we're most familiar. "Father" and "Lord" are two of them. We can change those words; it's not blasphemy to do so. In so doing, let's remember though that any words will limit us. To give God a sex (whether male or female) is awfully egotistical of us; but hard to get away from, since few of the words in the English language are neuter. The one place in the Bible where God is described by God reads, "I am who I am." (Exodus 3:14). In addition, the male image has arisen among Christians--many of the Hebrew expressions for God in the Old Testament are feminine.

2. Everything in the Bible was written by MEN, and addresses itself to MEN; it's as if

we're not even alive. Plus, whenever we ARE mentioned, it's doing the cooking or being used as a concubine. The whole thing is sexist from the word go.

-Let's face it, the Bible was written in a patriarchal society, and to many lesbians today it's sexist. What we have to do then is get beyond the "he's," "him's," "mankind's" and "men," to understand what's actually being said to all of us. Am I to refuse a large sum of money, simply because the envelope in which it's contained is addressed to Mr. Susan Day? Not on your life! Am I then to refuse the richness of God's grace for the same reason? As the money was meant for me, so God's grace was meant for me.

3. I can do without all the ceremony and pompousness of the services, the roleplaying and powertrips--it's men laying their trips on us again.

-The various rituals of a worship service are symbolic expressions through which we grow closer to God. They aren't necessary; the community of togetherness is. We can change our symbols; we can discard them; but we must understand what they mean first. I would personally hate to toss most of them away--I may change their clothing; but the body is important.*

4. Communion (or the Eucharist) is a barbarian, cannibalistic symbol... and it's not for women!

-The ceremony of figuratively eating the body of Christ and drinking his blood has been sometimes termed, in a word, gross. The act of giving a lover or a friend a rose, a common contemporary symbol of love, is lovely. The rose has thorns and withers in a few days--that's also a way of looking at it, less poetic but just as real.

There's something very real about Jesus Christ. Christ isn't just historical fact, or historical myth. Christ has a spirit, a deep love for us, a gentleness, an emotional strength that penetrates our limited perspective of history, that rises above the sexist roles we've developed. It's those qualities which engulf us when we pray and when we let this physical symbol of Christ run through our bodies.

5. Why should anyone be placed higher than others, a minister (usually male) dictating what God is all about; why should he know more than anyone else?

-Contrary to common thought, a minister is not above everyone else (ministers should heed this, by the way). In Matthew 23: 1-36, Jesus addresses this issue. Verses 10-12 in

particular read, "Neither be called masters, for you have one master, the Christ. He who is greatest among you shall be your servant...."

6. Why should we bother dealing with the structural church (or those men) at all if it's oppressive? Why not go off on our own? -We could go off on our own--but only temporarily; for to become truly closer to Christ, the divisive distinctions our society has made between people must be torn down.

"Nosotros los Gays Hispanos . . ."

Gay Hispano, ya es hora de que nos organicemos y que tomemos parte en la Revolucion Liberacionista. Hemos dejado toda la lucha a nuestros hermanos y hermanas de habla inglesa. Nos hemos quedado en el anonimato, moviendonos tras bastidores, aprovechandonos de sus triunfos pero nosotros sin hacer nada. Pero la hora ha llegado de que nos dejemos ver y sentir. Somos muchos y unidos venceremos y tendremos todos los derechos que nos han quitado.

Hasta ahora nada se ha hecho por nosotros los Gays Hispanos. No hay ninguna otra organizacion para gays hispanos, todo es por y para los gay de habla inglesa. Si nosotros no hacemos nada por nosotros mismo seguiremos en el anonimato. Para evitar esto y para empezar a dejarnos sentir como una organizacion Gay Hispana, la METROPOLITAN COMMUNITY CHURCH HISPANA ha sido creada. Esta tiene como objetivo crear un lugar de reunion social-religiosa para hispanos e hispanas.

Esta nos da la oportunidad de hacernos a Dios. Dios que nos ha hecho, que nos ama y que quiere nuestro bienestar tanto fisico como espiritual, ha puesto en mi corazon la creacion de la MCC HISPANA, para servirles no solo en lo espiritual sino tambien en lo social y moral.

Como GAY HISPANOS debemos cooperar para demostrar que nosotros nos preocupamos por el mejoramiento de la comunidad gay de Nueva York.

La MCC Hispana es una iglesia no denominacional, es ecumenica. No importa su religion, sexo, color o edad para ser bienvenido. Tenemos servicios religiosos seguido de una discucion amena y social. Gay Hispano esta es tu Iglesia, es la unica organizacion gay hispana. Unete a nosotros y juntos triunfaremos!

La MCC HISPANA se reune todos los martes a las 8pm en Calvary Church en el 61 Gramercy Park North. Esto es en Park Ave. y 21 St. Para mayor informacion llamame a 777-6838 o 674-4850. O escriba al Rev. Jose Mojica, c/o MCC HISPANA, P.O. Box 1757, General Post Office, New York, N.Y. 10001.

La Paz y el Amor de Cristo sea contigo.

As the Bible says, "there is neither male nor female, for we are all one in Christ Jesus." (Galatians 3:28)

*What I've been writing so far in essence is, Yes there are expressions within the Church which turn us off as feminists; and yes, it's theologically valid for us to change those expressions.

Personal Contracts in Gay Relationships

The Case Western Reserve University Institute on the Family and the Bureaucratic Society is undertaking an in-depth study of personal contracts made by individuals prior to or after establishing a Gay household, Marvin B. Sussman, Selah Chamberlain Professor of Sociology, has announced.

The first stage of the project is to determine what are the provisions written into these contracts, such as those related to earnings, wills, insurance and mortgages. The second stage will be to discover how and why such contracts are developed and the reason for specific contract provisions. The third stage will be a study of their "legality" including both current and potential influence on family law; how the courts and legislative branches of government are responding to such contracts; and the experience of Gay couples in implementing such agreements.

Documentation of Gay experience with contracts will provide guidelines for developing agreements which are likely to fall within the "Public Policy" interpretations made by jurists regarding such matters as property settlement, payment of debts, inheritance, etc.

Dr. Sussman says, "We invite persons to assist in this research by providing us with copies of personal contracts, their own, those of colleagues, friends, acquaintances or relatives. We are extremely interested in learning from those who do not have written contracts how they work out the economic and social relationships of the partnership. Consequently, we would especially welcome an exchange of views and ideas on this subject."

Persons interested should write: Marvin B. Sussman, Director, IFBS Haydn Hall Case Western Reserve University Cleveland, Ohio 44106

Holy Unions

by The Rev. John Barbone, pastor MCC Washington, D.C.

"Peace and happiness in life seem to involve 'joining' in some way with other people for growth."

MANY people react negatively to the concepts of "holy union" or "holy matrimony," to what they consider the necessity for any type of ceremony, religious or civil, which seems to "give permission" for people to make a covenant with one another on the basis of something as personal and private as love.

We must therefore first combat the impression that, in MCC, these two states constitute the granting of permission for people to make such a covenant. Indeed, this would be presumptuous and authoritarian (though there is an aspect of "constructive commentary and evaluation" which is frequently misinterpreted as permission).

Love is probably the most abused word in society today, and the Gay culture is no exception. A couple--gay or heterosexual--does one slow dance at a bar and then proclaims an undying, never-ending love. Because of this, the institution of marriage has suffered greatly both in the meaning and in the joy that the state itself should evoke in the lives of the people who have chosen it.

In its traditional form, marriage is the union, or covenant, between a man and a woman who come together until "death do them part." But the scope of such a covenant today is broadening and deepening, both in the sense of who can make one and in the terms of the covenant itself. There is much to be said about the possibility of individuals joining themselves to one another in a relationship which is a unique outpouring of their subjective beings, and that in this outpouring there is little that resembles our traditional concept of marriage.

Nonetheless, this absence of the "traditional" or "conventional" does not negate the beauty nor the goodness of a covenant of love between people. (Though calling to mind the difficulties involved and the risk of misinterpretation, a covenant of this sort might even be considered among more than two people.) This broadening of the marriage covenant concept now includes a relationship between two people of the same sex and their right to love one another and freely to enter into a covenant which calls God's blessings on them.

In MCC, this covenant is called holy union. Since it declares a relationship based on the common, mysterious and fulfilling state of love, it must be understood both theologically and sociologically, lest it be regarded as a farce, or a travesty of heterosexual marriage,

rather than one of the most significant of human experiences.

Why are holy unions or marriages necessary, if the persons involved enter the covenant themselves, define it in personal terms, work within its free and liberating structure, and together ask the blessing of God on their union?

Quite simply, such a covenant is a social phenomenon as well as a private one, representing a mirroring of the oneness of humanity. Peace and happiness in life seem to involve the concept of "joining" in some way with other people for the purpose of growth. Friendships, business partnerships, religious communities, peace treaties, loan companies, neighborhood organizations--as common as these may seem, all are covenants for the purpose of growth and mutual benefit.

So too it is with holy unions and holy matrimony. It involves a similar agreement elevated by participation in the Divine. Within it, persons come together for the purpose of growth and out of love, thereby making the concept of the oneness of humanity more of a reality than if they were not together. Further, it gives witness to the expression of love and at-one-ness with others, far too frequently obscured by modern society. It is right for people who feel called to this state of union to accede to it with a joy and exuberance which prompts them to share in a public way their covenant with the world, as represented by the community in which they live.

In a Christian context, love is a gift from God, and the public sharing of this emphasizes divine sanction and a participation in the love of God. Hence the rite of holy union or holy matrimony is the Church's sharing in the "witness" and "worship" of the community to the experience of love. It is especially fitting for people to include God in their covenant, since it is through him that we are capable of loving and being loved.

Knowledge too is essential to love and is a process of sharing and growing. Through knowledge, love matures and liberates the persons from selfishness. It is not likely that one can love what one does not know. In the past, too frequently in the Gay scene love's focal point revolved exclusively around sexuality with little attention given to the interrelating of the total persons. The capability which each has of "knowing"

another person is the fulfillment of the total love experience. Contrary to the notion that a marriage or holy union is the merging of persons into one, it is important to recognize the individuality and uniqueness of the persons. Knowing the loved person in every way possible broadens and deepens the total experience of the relationship. This enables growth to take place on the part of both, as individuals and as covenanted persons.

This is why there are both qualitative and quantitative requirements before the rite of holy union or holy matrimony is ministered in our church. We require a certain time for the relationship and at least two counseling sessions with a minister. Questions in these sessions are geared to areas that will assist the persons in determining for themselves the stability, the seriousness, the beauty, the joy and the sanctity of the state to which they aspire. The areas of probing include honesty, ability to communicate, common sense, acceptance and respect for one another's individuality, a recognition of both the human and divine realms of the relationship, and generally how the couple views the covenant as an instrument of growth of their total beings.

The questions are designed to give the counselor some insights into the personalities and values of the individuals involved. The answers leave impressions in the mind of the counselor which can be dealt with in a constructive way in subsequent sessions. This is not a fool-proof system, and some people try to say what they think the counselor wants to hear, but usually the counselor can detect such an attitude.

"It is not likely that one can love what one does not know."

Though tact and consideration must be exercised to make sure the counseling does not take on the appearance of an Inquisition, the Church is responsible for taking every step possible to preserve the reverence and seriousness of such covenants. This is necessary both from the standpoint of their being rites of the Church and from the Church's responsibility to assist the future well-being of the persons involved.

The exchange of vows is performed by the people involved with the presiding minister as the chief witness. The congregation functions as that public body under whose auspices the rite is performed and provides the worshipping context, during which the couple asks God's blessing and shares their "oneness" with their community. In giving witness to the world through its community, the Church imparts an emphasis on the social significance of the covenant; by placing it in the realm of a worshipful act, the Church says that it is pleasing in the eyes of God, whose blessing is sought.

These covenants are not to be taken lightly. They are akin to the covenants shared by God with humankind long ago, and more recently with the fulfillment of the duty imparted to us by Jesus Christ when he urged us to love one another as he loved us. God has entered into covenants with us based on love, and it is fitting for us to do likewise.

Requirements for Holy Union

MCC, Washington D.C.

1. Usual minimum age requirement for both parties is 18 years.
2. The couple must have been: a. living together for six months or more; and/or b. dating for one full year or more.
3. At least two letters from friends or relatives attesting to the fact that the time element in #2 above is true, and that the relationship, as far as the writer's knowledge is concerned, is a stable one which is seriously taken.
4. If one or both of the individuals have been married legally, copies of their divorce or legal separation papers should be submitted to the church office for inclusion in their file.
5. If one or both of the individuals have been previously joined in holy union, a statement of dissolution must be included in the couple's file.
6. The agreement to perform the ceremony or the decision not to perform the ceremony is to be made by the counselor, after consultation with the pastor or another authorized minister of the church. Such authorization is given by the pastor who is responsible for choosing someone competent and qualified to act in such a capacity.
7. At least two counseling sessions must be attended by the couple with a counselor assigned by the pastor. These sessions should be spaced at least two full weeks apart at times mutually determined by the counselor and the couple.
8. After the final counseling session, the decision to perform or not perform the ceremony will be related to the couple. If the decision is not to perform the ceremony, the minister will consider it a matter of conscience to relate in a constructive manner the reasons for the decision and will make recommendations accordingly. If the decision is to perform the ceremony, the minister should offer some constructive advice pertaining to areas which might need to be worked on and will also encourage further growth and maturation as individuals and as a couple.

Questions Used in Holy Union Counseling

1. Basic information: addresses, marital status.
2. If there has been a previous marriage, holy union or a relationship of any duration, please explain why you feel it ended and what is the present rapport with your former partner.
3. If there are children involved from your previous relationship, what is the relationship between your intended partner and the children?
4. How long have the two of you: a. known each other? b. lived together? c. contemplated this covenant?
5. Why do you feel a holy union or holy matrimony is necessary?
6. What is the role of God in your relationship?
7. Create hypothetical situations to determine the degree of communication and interaction of the couple:
 e.g.: One is not feeling well and resting at home, when the other arrives with a group of friends getting ready to have a party. How would the situation be handled?
 e.g.: One is extremely up-tight and informs the other that he or she is going to take the car and go for a long ride to do some thinking. What reactions take place?
8. What is the subject matter of the "worst" disagreement you have had? How was it resolved? Has it reoccurred?
9. What is the role of jealousy in your relationship?
10. Do you have friends in common?
11. What social circles do you move in?
12. What hobbies or interests do you share?
13. What is the role of fidelity in your relationship?
14. Is fidelity a value which you have simply applied to your relationship or has it evolved as a natural overflow of your relationship?
15. How completely do you feel that you have revealed yourself to one another?
16. Do you feel that you have shared everything important about yourself with your intended spouse? If not, would you share it now?
17. Is either of you into "role-playing?"
18. Do you feel that a holy union or holy matrimony is the merging of two persons into one, so that personalities have to merge as well?

East Hampton

-- Rodes Currie

Altogether lacking in self-assurance
 As I am I can't shout it is I,
 Good people, the Protestant whore,
 Old one eye and speak severely to you
 Of my travels in the kingdom of the blind.

Somewhat stunned, as I have been
 By life, its vicissitudes,
 Its dazzling inequities I can only
 Address you in the mildest tones
 Too bad express a tentative hope
 That you won't co-sign
 A mortgage on life's back row
 Become part of an undertaker/corpse
 Arrangement fraught with intimations
 of Virginia Woolf
 Cloth/coif yourself
 For photographs called after
 Hands fluttering toward smiles
 of welcome
 Beneath eyes glassy with self-deceit.

Now class each of you please turn
 to his neighbor
 For help in detecting early symptoms:
 Is the total face wreathed in false
 assumptions
 As to the necessity for something
 Being essentially wrong, absent,
 That ever shall be
 Misplaced, where, irretrievably gone,
 A congenital lack to be endured
 Or something merely missing but at hand
 Like lost bifocals? Let's hope not

Because in its final stages this ailment
 Leaves you listless, beached
 In the sun with a pulserate
 Erratic as joints circumnavigating
 Almaden, your ears will ring with
 The prison songs of ubiquitous cassettes
 That set strangers in chains clanking
 About howling get me off this bloody
 treadmill that leads
 To brunches that ease the way
 To naps before cocktails.

The terrace: that's where it all begins
 If you find it befogged with stinking colognes
 That sweep about on gusts of defensive
 laughter
 Get far away from Suffolk County
 Flag down a bus take off
 Before candlelight can supersede
 the Monet seascape
 And guests' tears start dripping
 Into the chicken Kiev.

Is there nothing good I can tell you I've seen
 Well there's forsythia's brief promise
 Of the possibility of all things also
 Carving cliches in the sand simple as
 God is love, Jesus loves me
 Now could anyone really
 I could trace out stand up stand up for
 whatever it is
 For you with a clam shell
 And ask you for your next assignment
 To tell me what it means but
 What's that you say
 I can't believe my ears
 I'd like nothing more than to be
 a Transylvanian peasant
 Make one quick sign of the cross
 And nail the shutters closed at sundown.

Airing Eli's Tomb

by Chris Glaser

REMEMBER Martha's objection to opening Lazarus' tomb? "Lord, by this time there will be an odor, for he has been dead four days!" Many people in our society--in our churches, governments, schools, and even (or maybe especially) our families--are afraid to deal with Gay people simply because they find the subject odious.

Seminaries are no exception; in fact, they may be even more touchy than other schools because statistics show more homosexual persons in the ministry than in many other professions. In order to be granted candidacy for ordination in my denomination, I took several psychological tests. A psychologist, reporting that I rated very high on the feminine side of the spectrum on one of the tests, watched closely for my reaction. I remained relaxed, smiled, and replied, "I'm not surprised--I know most ministers rate high in femininity." Then I remarked that hopefully women's liberation would change psychologists' habits of arbitrarily assigning some traits to females and others to males.

Just because most ministers rate high in femininity by no means indicates that most are gay. However, it does increase chances that their so-called "femininity" does extend to their sexual desires and even their sexual behavior.

This worries many seminary officials.

It doesn't seem to worry Colin Williams, though. As Dean of Yale Divinity School, he was asked by an excited Admissions Committee chairman what to do about an otherwise-qualified applicant who indicated he was gay. "What's the problem?" Dean Williams is reported to have said, "Accept him!"

But it does seem to bother other officials and professors at the school. Several years ago, quite a stir was caused by a sodomy charge leveled at a former instructor. This past school year, when the Rev. Troy Perry was invited to speak, the student body president fought tooth and nail to get the invitation withdrawn. "I'm tired of these minority concerns," he told me. "It's time we realized that most of the students here are white, heterosexual males!" One of my professors, learning I was organizing a gay Christian group on campus, spoke to me about "the value of shame," and concluded, "What right do we have to tell these people they shouldn't be ashamed?" Astounded, I replied, "What right do we have to tell them they should be ashamed? And we've been doing that for years!"

For several years there has been an informal gay group at Yale Divinity School whose meetings have been understandably clandestine and infrequent. Last November, a Gay Christian Support Group (GCSG) began meeting weekly to share common concerns. Like the early Christians, its meetings are still secret, but its members are gaining confidence in sharing their needs, hopes, sorrows and joys with each other. They're also gaining confidence to share themselves more fully with friends outside the group. This group will continue to meet during the coming academic year alongside a new Gay Christian Support Group at Yale University. The new group will minister to the spiritual and religious needs that the already-existing secular Gay Alliance at Yale cannot. A lesbian from the GCSG is mainly responsible for this. With my help, she persuaded the Yale Religious Ministry to give us a place to meet, a limited budget, and membership in the YRM itself.

In the summer of 1972 when the Rev. Bill Johnson invited me to attend MCC's General Conference in Los Angeles, I would never have imagined myself as a gay activist at Yale Divinity School. I had chosen that summer to make a decision as to whether my homosexuality stood in the way of entering the professional Christian ministry, and if so, what to do about it. Through scripture, prayer, Christian community (both straight and gay), family, friends, Bill Johnson's and MCC's examples, I accepted God's love. Like the language of love, the language of faith has been so abused that to say, "I accepted God's love" may sound meaningless. But to anyone who has experienced it richly and deeply, that's all that needs to be said. I felt God smiling on my life.

But even a year later as I travelled to New Haven, Connecticut, to begin the fall term at Yale Divinity School, I never properly imagined what God was going to give me in the coming year. I never imagined I'd be proposing to start a ministry to the gay community as my field work, or that the school would give me a thousand-dollar traineeship to do it. I never imagined my being "out front" and the sorrows and joys such openness can bring. I'm grateful that God has a more creative imagination than I have.

As I began the gay ministry, I found that many students at YDS were uptight about sexuality in general, let alone homosexuality. Everybody discussed their field work, yet when I mentioned the gay ministry there was embarrassed silence and/or pretended boredom, and often someone would change the subject. One woman confided that she had nothing against

homosexuality itself, but the way lesbians had made passes at her was disgusting. (Funny, I never minded when heterosexual women made passes at me!) Others didn't understand why I was "making a big thing of it."

What these people were experiencing was what Martha experienced at Lazarus' tomb: they didn't want to open what they considered a can of worms.

Some Gay students, while affirming my ministry, expressed similar desires not to stir things up. "Can't you see yourself as ever getting heterosexually married?" one asked, indicating that was his own intention. "This openness is dangerous for you," he added, thinking of my career. Another, a married student, wrote, "Let's face it, I am 'paranoid,' a closet case. I cannot afford to become labeled. You aren't, you're honest and open, and I admire your courage. We will not be able to spend much time together." He added, "You affirmed me in a way I haven't experienced in a long, long time. I have also been left feeling frightened and seriously trying to see what future there is..." Just being open helped some, while challenging and threatening others.

"Lord, by this time there will be an odor . . ."

Yet most of the YDS community apparently did want open discussion about homosexuality. I gained the support of several administration and faculty members in bringing Troy Perry to speak in October 1973. Some expressed concern that few people would attend his lecture, but over 100 crowded into the Common Room to hear him. The interest shown that night and in subsequent lectures, discussions and films prompted the Pastoral Concerns Committee to later announce plans for a year-long symposium on sexuality during the '74-'75 term. It also stimulated Reflections, a quarterly published for YDS students and alumni, to begin pulling together an issue on the homosexual person and Christianity to be published next year.

At first I didn't feel the need to discuss my homosexuality with many of my friends at YDS. If they knew, they didn't seem to want to talk about it. However, I soon learned that they did want to talk about it--but not with me. I was disappointed and hurt. They went to my roommate, asking if it wasn't difficult to be living with a homosexual. They were willing to commiserate with him; the student body president even offered him a chance to move.

None of these people had asked me if it wasn't difficult being gay in an anti-gay world or if it wasn't difficult living with a heterosexual! The night I learned what had been happening I cried myself to sleep, feeling utterly forsaken. But in the morning I discovered God had given me new strength. I began a

private campaign to make everyone feel comfortable with me and with homosexuality.

However, if those whom Jesus commanded had spent too much time and energy comforting Martha as she protested that the stench would be too much, they would never have removed the stone that covered the opening of Lazarus' tomb. So, though I consciously tried to make people feel more comfortable (the priestly task of ministry), I could not forget to challenge them also (the prophetic task of ministry). A Christmas vacation in California gave me renewed strength. I hung several posters on the campus and placed notices in the weekly campus paper that read:

"Gay? Have some gay feelings? Meet and share with other YDS gay Christian women and men. Please call Chris Glaser at 789-1349 or write him at Box 59 for more information."

The posters were ripped down; I replaced them. Again they were ripped down. Checking and replacing posters became a daily task. Whoever kept ripping them down actually helped me present my message to the larger YDS community. In the campus paper and on a video-taped news-magazine I was not only able to comment on the blatant hostility of the person ripping the posters down, but also discuss the latent hostility or apathy of many professors and students toward the subject of homosexuality.

Through the Gay Alliance at Yale, I joined with other Gay people in speaking to several classes at the University. With my lesbian friend I spoke at a local Congregational church. And I spent hours upon hours speaking with fellow students and faculty--gay, bi, and heterosexual. Toward the end of the year, even an admittedly-homophobic person came to me. And I spoke with some alumni. One such alumnus illustrated how futile some of my efforts were by responding to an hour's conversation with a letter in which he said, "I trust that you will not let the Joy go out of your life by refusing to let Christ in--in to the innermost part of your being, for I believe he can renew, transform, and redeem us fully according to our desire to want him to do it." He concluded by recommending that I investigate the bad side-effects of "long-term homosexuality."

"I'm tired of these minority concerns," the student body president said. "It's time we realized that most of the students here are white, heterosexual males!"

Another attack from the "enemy" gave another opportunity for dialogue on the homosexual person and Christianity--this time on the campus of the undergraduate University. Speaking one Sunday morning

in Battell Chapel, the Rev. William Muehl, a professor of practical theology at YDS, attacked gay liberation. If I were more radical, I would have stood up and said, "You're wrong." Instead, I stormed out of the church, causing a stir among members in the congregation and startling Muehl himself.

"I felt God smiling on my life."

After studying the written sermon, some of us from the GCSG spoke with him that week. We also spoke with the deacons of Battell, urging that some forum be sponsored to counterbalance Muehl's attack. The result was an evening showing of the film on Bill Johnson's ordination, *A Position of Faith*, followed by a panel discussion including Mr. Johnson, Susan Day of MCC New York, and two YDS professors. Over 100 attended. Bill Johnson also spoke at a YDS noontime discussion to over 80 students.

The stone had been rolled away from Lazarus' tomb and the air was beginning to clear. Jesus said, "Come out!", and

the miracle was taking place right before our eyes at Yale Divinity School.

A fellow student I didn't know well wrote me a letter after a sermon I preached the last week of school. For a long time, he said, he had had a liberal attitude about homosexuality, but he was further sensitized to the issue when the woman he loved and had hoped to marry revealed to him that she was gay, severing communications with him. Though he seemed to understand her need to do this, it nevertheless caused him much pain (just as it probably caused her much pain). I was reminded that Gay people are not the only ones who suffer in the tumult surrounding homosexuality.

His letter also reminded me that, though many disagreed with my work, many more received what God had given me with gratitude: "Although you have had no way of realizing it, in no small way you have helped me to understand the difficult situation in which a homosexual person finds him or herself... I look to a day when every person will be valued not for their race, religion, political beliefs, or sexual orientation, but for their qualities as a person... I look forward to the day when we will be colleagues in the ordained ministry."

Letter to the Editor

To the Editor:

I read with interest Rev. Wells' "Sodom and Gomorrah" in your March-April issue. I am writing to acquaint your readers with the traditional Jewish view of that event... seen from this mishna written at the end of the second century A.D.: "Four types of people there are: he who says, What is mine is mine and what is yours is yours. This is the average person. Some say this view is typical of the people of Sodom."¹ This view is reiterated throughout the Talmudic literature. The ancient sages believed that one whose philosophy is "What's mine is mine and yours yours" will feel no responsibility to aid strangers and will eventually detest people who do help them and finally attempt to degrade strangers by raping them. A responsibility to aid strangers and other oppressed classes is repeatedly stressed throughout the Torah.

Rabbi Moses, the son of Nachman, a contemporary of Maimonides, explains that Sodom was singled out for punishment despite the fact that other peoples had the same attitude toward strangers, because Sodom was located in the Promised Land. That land cannot bear such iniquity. He compares it to committing a minor sin in the king's palace, which would deserve a greater punishment than if it had been done in a different location.² (I would hope that present-day Israel would repeal their oppressive homosexual

laws since the Holy Land cannot abide oppression of strangers and other disadvantaged classes.)

The Talmud states, "The rabbinical courts must compel people not to act like Sodomites; therefore, when one uses another person's property without damaging it or diminishing it, one does not have to pay for its use."³

If any of your readers are interested in knowing more about the Jewish interpretation of Sodom, I would suggest they read about it in the volume of Louis Ginzberg's *Legends of the Jews* dealing with stories about Abraham.

The Jewish interpretation of the story of Sodom and Gomorrah does not make things easy for us. We can still be called Sodomites and be deserving of severe punishment if we neglect to love the strangers in our midst. "Love the stranger, as you were strangers yourselves in the land of Egypt."⁴ We who have been treated as outcasts by the religious establishment must strive to make every newcomer feel at home in our churches and synagogues. The God who lifts the oppressed from degradation demands that we do likewise. The bar scene, whether gay or straight, evaluates people on the basis of their age and physical attractiveness. We cannot allow these attitudes to enter the house of God.

Unfortunately one finds very few elderly people in the gay religious groups. Could

it be that we are perceived as marriage marts, as places where people come primarily to seek lovers and sexual partners, thereby making many elderly and unattractive people feel out of place? I am not advocating a "do gooder" approach. Rather, I believe, an atmosphere must be developed which emphasizes that finding a lover is not the most important thing in life. We must stop behaving the way the traditional spinster is depicted--waiting forever for the Right Man. We must stress that the most meaningful relationships are not necessarily sexual. We can develop the most beautiful friendships with people whom we are not attracted to. Jewish tradition does not believe that David and Jonathan were lovers. However, it is recorded that their relationship was more beautiful than that between lovers.⁵

I believe that we can and must create an atmosphere of true fellowship in our synagogues and churches, thereby reducing much of the tension found in our social events, giving every individual a sense that he/she has a home and is needed. In such an atmosphere many more people would, as an added blessing, find the persons with whom they would like to intertwine their lives.

Signed,
Paul Samuels
Spiritual Leader of Congregation
Beth Simchat Torah,
The Gay Synagogue

NOTES:

1. Ethics of the Fathers, ch. 5, sec. 13
2. Moshe Ben Nachman (Nachmanides), Commentary on the Torah, in Hebrew. I refer to his comments on Genesis 19:5. I believe that this valuable commentary has recently been translated into English.
3. Baba Kama, Talmud Bavli, ch.2.
4. Deuteronomy 10:19.
5. Ethics of the Fathers, ch. 5, sec. 19.

THE REV. HOWARD WELLS RESPONDS:

"There is no evidence that lack of hospitality sometimes resulting in townspeople raping visiting strangers was as widespread as my friend Paul Samuels implies--either in the Bible or any other ANE primary source I know of. (I suppose that a weak case could be made of it though on the basis of Judges 19.)

"Nevertheless, even if such abhorrent practices were common, they were merely the manifestations of the greater sin--inhospitality to the stranger. And rape--either heterosexual or homosexual--is wrong. Undoubtedly some persons who were allegedly subjected to this indignity were women; therefore, to regard or imply that such sexual practices were solely homosexual, as Paul does, is unrealistic and unfairly weighted in one direction. I do concur with Paul though that the primary sin of Sodom was inhospitality to the stranger."

The Gay Academic

Manuscripts are being sought for The Gay Academic: An Interdisciplinary Collection of Essays by Gay Academics Writing as Gay Academics. ETC. Publications will publish the volume as edited by Dr. Louie Crew, professor of English and co-editor with Dr. Rictor Norton of the special issue of College English on "The Homosexual Imagination." Each essay in The Gay Academic will be a showcase of the positive achievements of a Gay scholar when she or he uses the special vantage of the Gay person in pursuing a specific discipline.

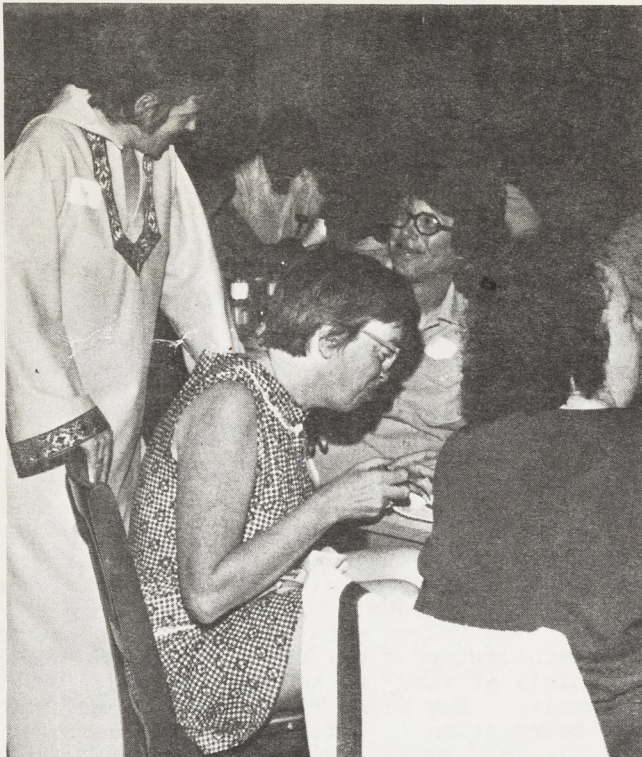
The volume will celebrate the honesty and insight made possible by open Gay sexual orientation. Gay scholars in all disciplines are invited to submit materials for consideration. The volume will attempt to demonstrate the catholicity of Gay scholarship, the diversity of points of view in the Gay scholarly community. Gay anger is not proscribed, but Gay celebration is definitely encouraged.

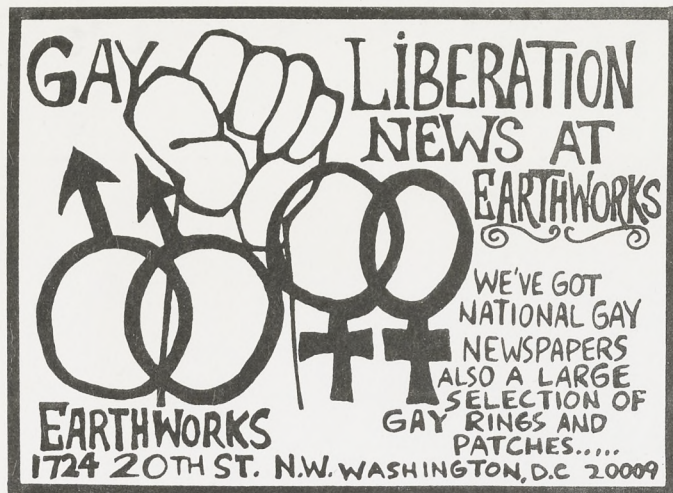
Interested scholars will find it useful to query with their plans before beginning manuscripts. Manuscripts should be 10-30 typed pages and conform to the MLA Style Sheet, 2nd Edition. Writers whose essays are accepted may elect either a modest payment or a pro rata share of the annual royalties. Deadline for submissions is January 1, 1975. Write (with stamped, self-addressed envelope) to Louie Crew, FVSC Box 1203, Fort Valley, Ga. 31030.



RAISING MS. CINDERFELLA from "Fractured Fairy Tales", an entertainment performed by members of MCC Washington, D.C. at District Conference, May 18, 1974. (Photo: Scott Johnson.)

FELLOWSHIP AT DISTRICT CONFERENCE, May 18, 1974,
Washington D.C. (Photo: Scott Johnson.)





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task is there!"

We witness for Christ's truth, which sets all
persons free;
Embrace the captive mind in faith and unity;
Embrace the captive flesh in love where fear
restrained;
Freed bodies and freed minds, our Lord for
all ordained.

All glory be to God, to Jesus Christ our Lord.
And to the Holy Spirit who has our faith restored.
So at the first it was, is now and e'er shall be;
One fellowship in Christ, through all eternity. Amen.

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